# Mistrial Called In Firebomb Murder Case

5-1 1111-5128

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (AP) — Circuit Judge Stanton Hall has declared a mistrial in the murder trial of James F. Lyons, 35, of Laurel, charged in the firebomb death of a Negro leader.

The judge acted last night after the jury reported itself hopelessly deadlocked after more than four hours deliberation. The jury's vote was reported at 6-6.

Lyons was accused in the January 1966 slaying of Vernon Dahmer, a businessman whose home and store near Hattiesburg were firebombed in what the state called a plot by the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

The state's chief witness in the Lyons trial—as in six previous trials in the case—was Billy Roy Pitts, a former Klansman.

Pitts testified that Lyons took part in planning the raid on Dahmer's home, that Lyons was one of four Klansmen assigned to destroy Dahmer's grocery store, and that he attended a meeting after the attack to discuss the results.

Pitts has been sentenced to life in prison for his part in the raid. He pleaded guilty to both murder and arson.

Lyons' wife testified that she was home in bed with her husband the night of the Dahmer attack, that they retired by 10 p.m., and that he didn't leave their home until he went to work the following morning.

In the series of cases in the Dahmer slaying, seven were charged with murder and arson while five were charged with arson alone. Other than Pitts and Lyons, two of the defendants were convicted of murder and sentenced to life; one was convicted of arson and sentenced to 10 years; and there were two mistrials, one on murder charges and one on arson charges.